

***Hasn't Science Made Religion Unnecessary?***

***Be Ready to Share*** Summer Sermon Series 2016

Job 38:1-41

Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

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**TEXT:** Job 38:1-41



We turn deeper into our series this summer on questions that emerge in the culture around us. The goal of this series is that you and I would change our praxis in some key ways, that we would change from being fearful and reserved and become more confident in engaging those around us in conversation. We are considering *Questions That Christians Hope No One Will Ask*. One of the questions that is lurking close underneath the surface for many people is: “Hasn’t Science Made Religion Unnecessary?” Many people have a default expectation that as human knowledge increases, our need for God decreases, and this morning, my great objective is to dispel this from your mind and to suggest, instead, that instead of hubris, we should be brought to humility by the amazing world around us. For those of us who do know Christ, we should not be in fear of scientific learning or inquiry, but our faith should drive us forward to consider the wonders that God has made and done in every field of study.

I want us to begin this this morning with a statement from Dr. Francis Collins. Francis Collins says this:

“On a warm summer day just six months into the new millennium, humanity crossed a bridge into a momentous new era. An announcement beamed around the world, highlighted in virtually all major newspapers, trumpeted that the first draft of the human



genome, our own instruction book, had been assembled.”

Francis Collins supervised the genome project for more than 10 years and then published a description of the human genome

“The human genome consists of all the DNA of our species, the hereditary code of life. This newly revealed text was 3 billion letters long, and written in a strange and cryptographic four-letter code. Such is the amazing complexity of the information carried within each cell of the human body, that a live reading of that code at a rate of one letter per second would take thirty-one years, even if reading continued day and night. Printing these letters out in regular font size on normal bond paper and binding them all together would result in a tower the height of the Washington Monument. For the first time on that summer morning this amazing script, carrying within it all of the instructions for building a human being, was available to the world.

“As the leader of the international Human Genome Project, which had labored mightily over more than a decade to reveal this DNA sequence, I stood beside President Bill Clinton in the East Room of the White House, . . . Prime Minister Tony Blair was connected to the event by satellite, and . . . Clinton's speech began by comparing this human sequence map to the map that Meriwether Lewis had unfolded [mapping the western part of the United States] in front of President Thomas Jefferson in that very room nearly two hundred years earlier. Clinton said, ‘Without a doubt, this is the most important, most wondrous map ever produced by humankind.’ But the part of his speech that most attracted public attention jumped from the scientific perspective to the spiritual. ‘Today,’ he said, ‘we are learning the language in which God created life. We are gaining ever more awe for the complexity, the beauty, and the wonder of God's most divine and sacred gift.’”

Collins continued:

“Was I, a rigorously trained scientist, taken aback at such a blatantly religious reference by the leader of the free world at a moment such as this? Was I tempted to scowl or look at the floor in embarrassment? No, not at all. In fact I had worked closely with the president's speechwriter in the frantic days just prior to this announcement and had strongly endorsed the inclusion of this paragraph. When it came time for me to add a few words of my own, I echoed this sentiment: ‘It's a happy day for the world. It is humbling for me, and awe-inspiring, to realize that we have caught the first glimpse of our own instruction book, previously known only to God.’”

You see, science and religion are actually not in conflict, and that's the point I want us to explore this morning. We often imagine that we have these very difficult questions for God, and we turn this morning to a portion of Scripture where the tables are turned and God asks us a set of questions. The Book of Job is a profound work. It has its own literary integrity. It is really a

series of questions about: Does this world have meaning? Does my life have meaning? What do I do when difficult things happen in my life, and how can they be explained? Does that mean God is no longer running the universe? Does that mean that God punishes us for our poor choices? The Book of Job addresses all of these questions, none of which we are going to talk about right now. We will address those later in the summer. Towards the end of the Book of Job, God enters the narrative, and when God speaks to us in response to our questions, He actually asks a us set of questions in Job 38,39, and 40. His first invitation to Job in Job 38:3 is to summon Job to appear before Him. We get a right scale in terms of gravity in the universe as God says:

*“Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to Me.”*

*Dress for action* is the ESV translation, which really tames the Hebrew idiom. The Hebrew idiom actually says: *Gird your loins* like a man. How appropriate this is for Father's Day. The imagery is: Man up, gird your loins, and I have some questions for you. So, the Lord begins by asking a simple question in Job 38:4:

*“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.”*

There is an awkward silence at that first question. “I didn't exist,” is the implied answer. The Lord asks the next question in Job 38:5:

*“Who determined its measurements—surely you know!”*

Again there is an awkward silence, and the silence remains for three chapters because the Lord is asking a set of questions to bring us into proper scale, if you will, with the universe around us and with His glory, weight, and majesty. There are astonishing parameters that are required for the universe to exist, for the earth to exist. The Lord asks Job in Job 38:6-7:

*“On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”*

Here we have just a very small glimpse into something that we wonder about but the Bible tells us almost nothing about. *The sons of God* is language in the Scriptures to describe the creation of the angels, the heavenly beings, and we are not told very much about that. But in these verses we get a glimpse that when God acted in creation, the angelic host which already existed just burst into songs of joy. There were moments in worship this morning when we couldn't hold our joy inside and we had to express that physically. The Lord tells us that when He acted in creation, even the heavenly host shouted for joy. That must have been some choir. The Lord asks about the depths of the sea. He asked in Job 18:12:

*“Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, . . .?”*

In Job 38:16, He asks:

*“Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep?”*

The only time that I've ever walked a little bit in the recesses of the deep was after I finished passing my PhD comp exams and my mind was just totally obliterated by studying for that. We got a great deal to go on vacation to the Caribbean during hurricane season, so everything was cheap. No one was there, and there was no hurricane, which was great, but I had the opportunity for the first time in my life to ever go sea trekking. Sea trekking was fascinating. I was the only person my family willing to do it. When you get in the water, they put on your head a helmet that is heavily weighted. It has a hose that pumps oxygen into the helmet, and as soon as you get into open water with this 60 pound helmet, you sink like a rock to the seafloor. Thankfully, that tube is pumping air into the helmet, and you can just walk around. There's an observation deck, and I saw my family looking out at me. At one point I saw them pointing to something, and they told me later that there was a shark swimming behind me. But, it was remarkable what was happening down in the depths of the sea, daily. I had had no awareness of it before, and I loved it. The Lord says in Job 38:17:

*“Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?”*

Do you have the power of life and death? He asks in Job 38:18:

*“Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare, if you know all this.”*

We have learned in the last hundred years that the universe is much larger than we thought before. I love having people in my life who can help me understand the size of the universe. Christine's brother is like this. He has a degree in physics from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and I was trying to grasp the size of the universe. I asked him: “Can you just scale this thing down for me? Let's just imagine that our planetary system is the size of a teacup—and I have the round shape in my mind. So, our planetary system is the size of this teacup, and planets are whirling around. If that's a teacup, then how big is the universe?” He thought about it, did a few mental calculations, and then he said: “Well, the universe is probably about the size of North America!” The Lord asked Job in Job 38:19:

*“Where is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the place of darkness?”*

I commend to you a great interview from Dr. John Lennox, who is a physicist in England. Those of us who remember Eric Metaxas' visit to Cincinnati, Eric has a set of interviews called *Socrates in the City*. If you search *John Lennox, Socrates in the City*, you can hear a fascinating description of a physicist's look at the universe and how it brings him into place of wonder and awe. A great portion of that interview is about light and energy. It's beautiful.

Deeper in Job 38, in verses 25-28, the Lord asks Job a set of questions about rain:

*“Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on a land where no man is, on the desert in which there is no man, to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground sprout with grass? Has the rain a father, or who has begotten the drops of dew?”*

I am not a theoretical physicist, and I struggle just to keep up with theoretical physicists when they are talking. The rain, however, is something that I see and know and enjoy. I remember the first time I was ever in Israel, and we were coming up to the bridge at Mount Carmel. We had traveled a great distance and were there on an archaeological tour around the land of the Bible, and it started pouring rain. I was thinking like an American tourist: “Hey, this trip cost a lot and it's raining, and I can't take good pictures in the rain, and it's colder than I expected, and can you do something about the rain? We're here for only two weeks.” I started grumbling, which is always dangerous theologically. The leader of the trip, Dr. David Assael, stopped me about four sentences into my complaint, and he said: “Oh, we always thank God for rain. If it doesn't rain here, then we starve, so we thank God for the rain.” I thought: “Okay, okay, I can download some pictures of Mount Carmel. We thank God for the rain.” Rain is one of those miracles that surround us, if you will, and I mean miracle not as something that can't be explained, but something that is so astonishing when you actually look into it. Earlier, in Job 5, Job mentions that the rain is one of the wonders that God has done.

I want us to consider the rain for just a moment, and I'm drawing on a theologian who has helped me see this. This is taken from a devotional called “Taste and See” by John Piper.

“Is rain a great wonder really wrought by God? Picture yourself as a farmer in the ancient Near East. You are far from any lake or stream. A few wells keep your family and animals supplied with water. But if the crops are to grow and the family is to be fed, then water has to come from another source on the field. So, where will it come from?

“Well, it will come from the sky. The sky? Water will come out of the clear blue sky? Not exactly. Water will have to be carried into the sky from the Mediterranean Sea, which is several hundred miles away, and then it will be poured out on the fields from the sky. Carried? How much does it weigh? One gallon of water is 8 pounds. If one inch of rain falls on one square mile of farmland during the night that is 2,323,000 cubic feet of water, which is 17,377,536 gallons, which is about 144,000,000 pounds of water.

“That's heavy. So how does it get up into the sky and stay up there if it's so heavy? Well, it gets up there by evaporation. Really? That's a nice word. What's it mean? It means the water stops being water for just a while so it can go up and not down. I see. Then how does it come down? Well, condensation happens. What's that? The water starts becoming water again by

gathering around little dust particles between .00001 and .0001 centimeters wide. That's small.

"What about the salt? Yes, the Mediterranean Sea is saltwater. That would kill the crops. What about the salt? Well, the salt has to be taken out. Oh. So the sky picks up millions of pounds of water from the sea, takes out the salt, carries the water (or whatever it is, when it is not water) for three hundred miles and then dumps it (now turned into water again) on the farm?

"Well, it doesn't *dump* it. If it dumped millions of pounds of water on the farm, the wheat would be crushed. So the sky dribbles the millions of pounds of water down in little drops. And they have to be *big* enough to fall for one mile or so without evaporating, and *small* enough to keep from crushing the wheat stalks. How do all these microscopic specks of water that weigh millions of pounds get heavy enough to fall? Well, it's called coalescence.

"Finally the farmer in the ancient Near East says, 'You know what? I'm just going to worship God and thank God for the rain.'"

Can we just thank God for the rain that you and I have nothing to do with? Would you call that a miracle? If you take a broad view of miracle, I'd say that's pretty close to miraculous, to pick up 144,000,000 pounds of water, take the salt out of it, carry it over your field, and then dribble it on it without you doing anything.

The Lord asks Job in Job 38:33 a deeper question:

*"Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth?"*

This is a much deeper question. Rain is profound, and I hope that you never experience the rain the same. I never have since reading that devotional. I thank God for the rain. I think it's extraordinary. Then the Lord asks in Job 38:34-35:

*"Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that a flood of waters may cover you? Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go and say to you, 'Here we are'?"*

Do you set the rule of the heavens? Do you sovereignly manage this universe? Again, our response of silence. The Lord then asks in Job 38:36:

*"Who has put wisdom in the inward parts or given understanding to the mind?"*

This is one of the grand miracles of all, that you and I are made in such a way that we have been given the capacity to see and appreciate, to behold the works of our heavenly Father, the Creator of the universe, to see them, even in part, and respond to Him in praise. The psalmist says: "The dust cannot praise You." Surely the Bible says in poetic metaphor at places that the trees of the field will clap their hands, but you see, we find the meaning of our existence when we respond to God's works in praise and worship. Are science and religion irreconcilable

conflict? Has science made religion unnecessary?

I want to turn to a few other eyewitness or key authoritative testimonies in this regard. One is Dr. Ard Louis. Ard Louis has a PhD. He is a Royal Science Society University Research Fellow. He is a Reader in Theoretical Physics at the University of Oxford. He leads an interdisciplinary research group studying problems on the border between chemistry, physics, and biology. Dr. Louis gave a talk at a Veritas Forum, similar to the one we helped host at the University of Cincinnati. When Ard Louis was asked publicly, “Has physics disapproved the existence of God?” He says:



“My initial reaction is that this question is not a very good one. It’s not a very good one because there is a limit on science. Science by its very nature asks questions about what is and what can be observed and tested and repeated. There are great vast, great borders that science is not equipped or empowered to address all. For these questions, we must look to metaphysics which is beyond physics. A more charitable response suggests that at the heart of the question, *Has physics disproved the existence of God?*, there is a question behind that question. The question behind that question is: *How do I obtain reliable information about the world? How do I know what's going on around me?* Science gives us tremendous tools of inquiry and study to evaluate and describe the world that we see.”

He goes on to say:

“Science has these defined limits on the edge. For him, science at its heart is studying the customs and praxis of the Creator. In reality, very few people live by pure science. No one lives as if science were enough. Our account of the world must be rich enough, thick enough, to contain the total spectrum of human meeting with reality, and for him that includes faith and worship of God.

“No one lives by pure science. For example, imagine that I want to be married. A truly scientific approach would be to randomly select a woman off the street. No one operates that way. Instead, we look to find willing partner. We get to know each other; we evaluate; we pray; we seek the will of God. At the end of the day, I can’t demand scientific certainty before deciding to marry someone. Nor is it advisable to perform repeated experiments! In truth, in order to marry, I must make a step of faith because there are aspects of marriage that I can only see from the inside.”

I really like that picture because science does give us tremendous powers of description for what we see around. It should stir our hearts to wonder, and yet, there are aspects of engaging

with reality that you cannot see or appreciate or respond to without a faith commitment. Faith and science are not in conflict with each other.

Ard Louis, at the end of this interview, says that for him, instead of asking the question, *Does science prove or disprove the existence of God?*, he asks the question, *Does starting from a God-centered worldview make more sense of the physical world than an atheistic world?* That's really the question. Louis asks if starting from a point of view that the world is created by an intelligent, powerful, Creator who can be known make more or less sense of what I actually see? For him, as a theoretical physicist, it makes more sense of what he sees in nature, what he sees in the lab—whether in the stars or on the microscopic level of the human genome—and suggests that there is a Creator.

We had a little time at the beach on our vacation. When you walk on the beach, occasionally you see evidence that someone has been there before. Sometimes you see a shark tooth and you step a little further back from water. Other times you see a sandcastle. Every time I see a sandcastle, some variation comes to my mind of who the family was that that made that. What dad got sunburned on his back trying to finish the castle when the kids bailed out? Of all the times I've seen a simple sentence in the sand like: *I love my family* or *John loves Mary*, it has never once occurred to my mind to suggest that these amazing wind patterns that blow over the beach have somehow managed to conspire to drop a sentence like that in the sand. If that is our normal reaction in processing information with the sentence in the sand, like *John loves Mary*, how is it possible to find on the beach a book typed out in pages as high as the Washington monument and say: "How random is that!" That shouldn't even occur to you. Instead, it should stir you to wonder.

I want to plead with you this morning if you're not a Christian. If you're not yet following Christ, I want to submit to you to come back into scale. Job 38 is saying: "Come back into scale." The hardest questions that we can think to ask are nowhere near the questions that God asks of us. So let's come back into scale, and let's let the world around us take us away from hubris, pride, and arrogance to a place of humility, and that's what the creation should do. If you do know Christ, then I want to challenge you this morning to move away from an anti-intellectualism, a place of fear, saying: "I don't want to know anything more. I have the Bible and my refrigerator magnets of my favorite verses. I don't want to hear anything more. I don't want any more information." That's not the posture of Christian faith. The posture of Christian faith throughout history has been that God made the world and He has made me, then He seems creative and powerful and worth knowing and brilliant, which legitimatizes almost all fields of study for the Christian. Science historically has come through and erupted out of men and women with deep Christian commitment, not the other way around. If you really believe that everything is random, then it is a disincentive to study something that could be repeated. Let me just remind

you that science is filled with men and women with deep Christian faith.

✧Nicholas Copernicus, who first put forward the system of planets going around the sun, did not see his system as in conflict with the Scriptures and often refers to God in his writings.

✧Francis Bacon was a philosopher who established scientific method of inquiry. Francis Bacon said: "It is true that a little philosophy will incline your mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy and learning will bring a man's mind close to religion." It is just a little learning that leads you away from God, but if you really look into it, if you look in as Francis Collins looks in, you say: "Oh yeah, that God language needs to be right in the center of the statement."

✧Johannes Kepler was a brilliant mathematician and astronomer and a devout Lutheran.

✧René Descartes, a French mathematician, the inventor of modern philosophy, had a deep religion faith. Descartes is remembered for the statement: "I think, therefore I am," which many people have quoted after the fact as asserting human independence. But for Descartes, that statement was the prelude to a final argument for him which is that if I have the capacity to think, that must have been given to me from outside by God, who has created me and designed me to know Him. That's the ultimate end.

✧Blaise Pascal, a physicist, inventor, and writer, a deeply committed Christian, invented the math that supports modern computing in the 1600s. In 1654, Pascal was given a vision by the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and it moved his heart to worship. He never forgot this meeting on the night of the 1654, and when Pascal died and they took off his jacket, they noticed some unusual stitching in the inside. When they removed the stitching, they saw that he had written down a note about his meeting of seeing Christ and the glory of Christ and the power of Christ. He had kept that in his coat pocket for the rest of his life.

✧Isaac Newton, figure of undisputed genius, was also a devoutly religious man. He saw numbers as reflecting God's creative power and His intellect.

✧Robert Boyle, one of the founders and key early members of the Royal Society, gave his name to Boyle's Law. He was also convinced of the truth of Christianity and wrote vehemently against the atheists of his day.

✧Michael Faraday, Gregor Mendel, Lord Kelvin, Max Planck.

I could go on and on and on. The reality is that vibrant Christian faith has nothing to be afraid of from science and learning. So we come back to the question: "Hasn't science made religion unnecessary?" I would ask we change this question to ask someone to concede: "Hasn't religion actually made science possible? Hasn't the reality of God made it possible to look out and say there is actually something out there that can be studied, known, and described?"

Lastly, we should approach this subject with humility and not hubris, with faith and not with fear. We should come to the place that Job comes to in the end, when Job finally gets to speak

again after God asks him all of these questions. Job says in Job 40:4:

*“Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand on my mouth.”*

I am small; You are big. The universe is telling us this every day. Well, that is a good beginning: I am small; God is big. That is a good beginning, but then God says: “You know what? I’ve got another chapter of questions, actually, because that’s not enough. It is not enough just to say of God: You are big; I’m small. Let me just go on and keep living my life however I want.” God asks another chapter of questions, and Job comes in Job 42 to the great ending. In Job 42:1 he says:

*“I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.”*

He says in Job 42:3:

*“I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”*

This is a confession of faith. This is Job's confession of faith: “Lord, it is not just that I am small and You are big, but I know You now that You can do everything and Your purposes will never be thwarted. You know what You are doing with the universe. You know what You are doing with me.” This is a statement of faith and dependence on God. This is not standing at a distance from God and saying; “I won't believe in You until I know everything and all my questions answered.” Nicky Gumbel, who started the Alpha course in England as a revival movement in the Anglican church, met with a very skeptical Englishman. The man came and he said: “I have these 35 questions for God.” Nicky Gumbel just cut him off at the beginning and asked: “If I can answer all 35 your questions, will you repent and put your faith in Christ and become a Christian?” The man replied: “Absolutely not!” Nicky said: “Then I’m not taking your first question seriously.”

Job says: “I spoke what I did not understand and now seeing who You are, You are amazing!” It is our commitment to the Lord that gives us the freedom to study and learn, and the church should be a place where learning is embraced, valued, and celebrated. It should be a place where a professor of chemistry can come and leave his lab, as we heard in Steve’s testimony today. I still don't understand what Steve is looking for in his research, the enzyme which is this this way or that way. I don’t know. Whatever is in there, I am glad that he can come here on Sunday morning and say: “It’s indescribable, how great is our God.” He can say with Anselm of Canterbury in his famous line almost 1000 years ago, *Credo ut intelligam*: “I believe in order that I might understand.” It is not the other way around. It is not the case that I understand everything and then I believe. It doesn't work that way. The subject is too great. It would be like talking with the woman that I talked with in the pastoral version of the airplane conversation. She was a brilliant young woman from India with a master's degree from Harvard, working in public health. She said: “I grew up culturally Hindu, but I've totally walked away from that.” She

said: "I looked into it, and it just wasn't true." I said: "I'm a Christian. I grew up without it, but I looked into it and I found it to be true." She said: "I could never make a commit like that because I could never know for sure." It was deep into the flight, but I took a risk. I said: "You don't live like that." She said: "What do you mean?" She had already told me that she was an accomplished violinist. I said: "That would be like your saying to me 'I will never study and learn to play the violin because I will never play like Itzhak Perlman.' That would be like saying 'I will never get into a committed relationship, I will never be married, because I can never know everything about that person.' In reality, it's in knowing enough to make commitment that then really opens up that life."

I believe there is super abundant evidence all around us pointing in the direction that this universe is not a chaotic, random place. I think there's enough data streaming every day, and you don't even have to have that in your cell plan. You get it every day, constantly, and there's enough information around us to say: "I believe in order that I might fully understand." I think you see this throughout the history of science. You see this in brilliant men and women living today and doing research. As believers in Christ, we do not need to fear the question: "Has science made religion unnecessary?" Religion makes science possible and worthwhile, and study is something that we cherish as believers in Christ. So, can we start the conversation on this topic? Can we ask some questions? Take an interest in the research someone is doing and ask them to explain it to you. Listen to them for a while, and then tell the story of who God is and what He has done. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank You this morning for Your grace and power. This world is pretty amazing, whether we look down at the microscopic level of our own DNA, whether we look at the phenomenon of the rain, whether we look at the size and scale of the universe, or whether we look at ourselves and that You have made us with a desire to know and understand. That desire comes from You, Lord. So I pray for those who are working and studying in fields of science, first. I pray that they would embrace their assigned topic. I pray, Father, that they would go to their knees and worship in their labs and see the wonders that You have done. I pray, Father, for those studying in the hard sciences or engineering or math, that You would help them to embrace that vocational calling as a believer, saying "I am studying My Father's works." They are unparalleled in greatness and intelligence and simplicity of design. Father, I pray for the rest of us who may not be working or studying in fields of science, that You would make us courageous and bold to start conversations with those who do, that You would forgive us, Lord, where we have buried our heads in the sand, afraid of new information. Help us, Lord, to embrace the wonders that You have done, and we will give You the praise of the glory.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.